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BEFORE BAGENAL'S CASTLE: EVIDENCE OF THE MEDIEVAL CISTERCIAN ABBEY AT NEWRY, COUNTY DOWN

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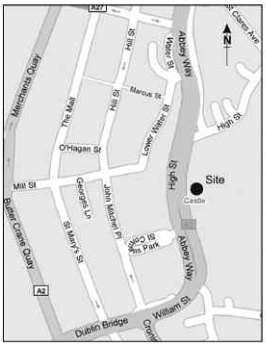
An excavation was undertaken in 2005 by Giles Dawkes of ADS Ltd under licence AE 05/052, on behalf of Newry and Mourne District Council, as part of the restoration and redevelopment of Bagenal's Castle, a 16th-century fortified house, and the McCann's Bakery building for use as the new Newry Museum. The excavation was located immediately north of the house within the adjacent bakery, and revealed the masonry wall foundations of at least one medieval building of the Cistercian abbey precinct. Above these foundations were 33 inhumations and an amount of disarticulated human bone including nine skulls interred in charnel pits. At least three, possibly four, of the individuals had suffered a violent death. The cemetery dates to between AD 1460 and 1660, a period covering both the twilight years of the Cistercian abbey and the initial use of the fortified house. It is suggested that the cemetery dates to the former period.



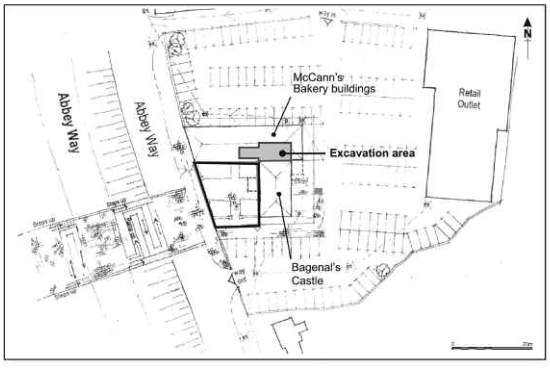


Fig 1 Site location.

INTRODUCTION

In 2005 Newry and Mourne Council acquired the site for redevelopment as the new Newry Museum with a Tourist Information Centre and facilities (Fig 1). As the site was of obvious archaeological significance, a programme of archaeological works was an integral part of the redevelopment. Archaeological Development Services Ltd (ADS) was commissioned by Consarc Conservation on behalf of Newry and Mourne Council to undertake the archaeological investigations in advance of and during the redevelopment. The Northern Ireland Department of the Environment (DoENI) recorded the standing building fabric of the fortified house. The standing building survey and the results of ADS investigations relating to the phases of the house will be the subject of a separate report.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The Cistercians developed as a separate order, out of a Benedictine monk's desire to follow the Rule of St Benedict more closely. The monk, Robert of Molesme, founded a community at Cîteaux in 1098 under stricter and more austere lines than the contemporary Cluniac and Benedictine houses. Although it was never the intention to found a new order, daughter houses rapidly began to develop and by the mid-12th century, 330 monasteries had been founded all over Europe, driven by the apparent need for a more disciplined, simple religious life (Aston 2002, 83).

The founding of the Cistercian monastery at

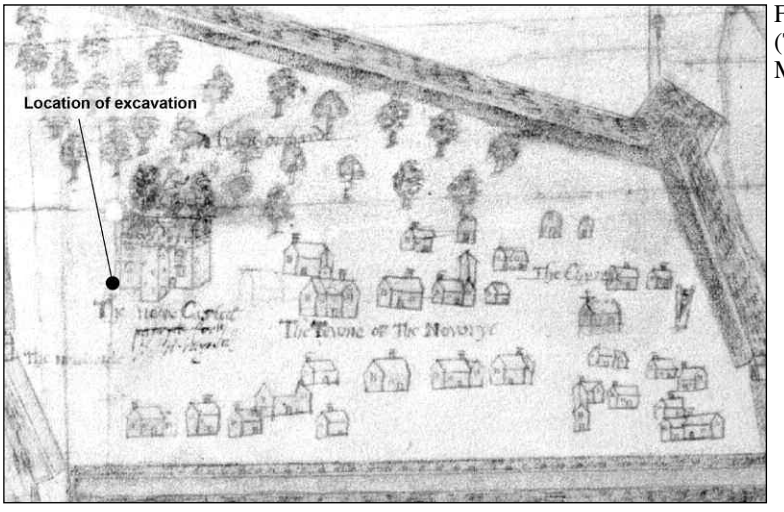


Fig 2 Lythe map circa 1570 (The National Archives, ref MPF 1/82).

Newry was part of this pan-European Cistercian expansion. The abbey was established in 1157 by Muirchertach Mac Lochlainn, king of Cenél nEógain, as a colony from Mellifont. Surprisingly for an order stressing humility and spartan living, the founders were often the great families and royalty of Europe, for whom it had become something of a fashion to promote monastic communities. It has also been suggested that the site may have been an existing Benedictine abbey, and that its disaffected monks broke away to join the new order (Gwynn & Hadcock 1970, 142).

The sites granted for these new communities were often on unoccupied, poor land, which suited the monks' desire for solitude. The small isolated settlement of Newry, situated between the marshy ground by the river and the steep upland slopes, surrounded by hills, would have held great potential for the monks, with their aptitude for manual labour and landscape improvements.

The abbey owned extensive lands, which included estates in Co Louth. These were seized by Edward III, although the abbey itself was outside the Pale.

None of the abbey buildings are still standing and so far none have been identified archaeologically. However, it is fair to assume that Newry, like other contemporary Cistercian monasteries, developed into an extensive complex of buildings with a nucleus of large buildings, such as the church and chapter house, and a periphery of smaller insubstantial buildings such as workshops and labourers' housing.

By the mid-14th century, most Irish abbeys were in decline. Never particularly wealthy to begin with, the enforced contributions to support the English wars crippled many, and from this time the abandonment of buildings and cost-cutting alterations were common.

Newry Abbey survived until 1538, when it was downgraded to a collegiate church. An inquisition formally dissolved the abbey in 1548 and recorded that the precinct consisted of 'college, church, steeple and cemetery, chapter house, dormitory and hall, two orchards and one garden containing one acre' (Small 1875, 42). In April 1552, Nicholas Bagenal took over formal ownership of the lands as part of his 21-year tenancy of Newry (Gwynn & Hadcock 1970, 142).

One of Bagenal's first acts was to fortify Newry with a defensive circuit of an earthen rampart and to construct his Newry residence. According to later historical sources, Bagenal built his fortified house reusing part of the abbey ruins. Harris, the earliest commentator, stated in 1744 that 'This Abbey … was granted to Marshall Bagenal, who made it his dwelling house'. He goes on to identify his dwelling as 'the house of the Abbot and … a very old building' (Harris 1744, 91). Small, writing in the latter half of the 19th century, echoes Harris: 'this building [Bagenal's Castle] appears to have occupied a portion of the site of the old monastery' (Small 1875, 72). Bagenal's re-use of the abbey ruins is entirely plausible. Monastic buildings were occasionally fortified by the English colonists as they were often the only large stone buildings in the landscape. Bagenal was also known to have fortified the abbey buildings at Armagh and re-fortified the ruins of the medieval castle at Greencastle, Co Down, on the shore of Carlingford Lough (Kerrigan 1995, 28).

Bagenal's fortified house was built some time between his taking control of Newry in 1552 and the drawing of the Lythe map around 1570 (Fig 2).

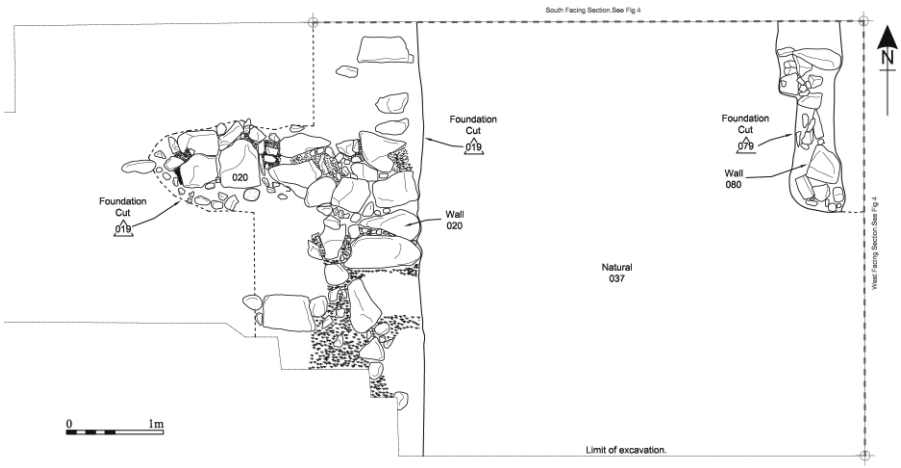


Fig 3 Plan of phase 2: medieval walls (20, 80).

The house was part of Bagenal's wider defensive scheme for Newry, which included enclosing the town with a rampart and ditch with bastion-like features at the corners. As Thomas points out, this ditch and rampart acted in effect like a giant bawn and explains the somewhat residential look of the house (Thomas 1992, 180).

Bagenal also appears to have levelled the remaining abbey buildings. On the Lythe map, dating to around 1570, none of the illustrated buildings, apart from the church, can be identified as clearly relating to the abbey. However, some other ruins of the abbey were apparently still standing in the 18th century. Harris mentions that 'some remains of the chapel of this religious house were standing till very lately' (Harris 1744, 90). Bassett (1886, 79) states that 'the remains of the abbey were extensive, and had to be removed in 1788 to facilitate works of public improvement'.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL BACKGROUND

Although extensive archaeological investigations have been undertaken in the immediate environs of the site, remarkably little has been found. A ditch with a U-shaped profile was found approximately 20m south of the fortified house by Norman Crothers of ADS in 1991. The ditch measured 2.8m wide and 1.4m deep with finds of late medieval pottery, leather shoes, iron slag, animal and human bone. The earliest ditch fill contained a French wine flask of probable 16th-century date and waterlogged twigs were radiocarbon dated to the late 15th and mid-17th century. Finds of residual 13th-century pottery were recovered from the upper ditch fills. A causeway of granite boulders had been built across the ditch during the infilling (Norman Crothers, pers comm).

Dermot Moore of ADS in 1999 undertook the archaeological supervision of the machine stripping of an area of 1500m² immediately to the north of the bakery building. Nothing of archaeological significance was recorded (Moore 2000).

The internal area of the fortified house ground floor was initially tested by John Ó Néill of Margaret Gowen and Co in 2000 and 2002 (Ó Néill 2002a; 2002b), and subsequently excavated by Ciara McManus of ADS in 2003 (McManus 2003). These investigations identified some of the features shown on the Lythe plans, notably the foundations of the internal dividing wall and the base of the north-western tower. Chris Farrimond of ADS excavated the area to the west of the fortified house in 2005 and nothing of significance was found, other than the 19th-century wall foundations of the bakery (Farrimond 2005).

THE EXCAVATION

The monitoring of the ground works for insertion of a lift-shaft pit and stairs in the McCann's Bakery building initially identified the archaeological deposits, which were subsequently excavated.

Phase 1: Natural geology

The natural orange brown sandy silt (37) with occasional lenses of clay and pebbles was located at approximately 12.60m OD. The natural was relatively level and was seen throughout the excavated area.

Phase 2: Medieval buildings

Two stone wall footings were recorded; north to south wall footing (20) and corner wall footing (80) (Figs 3, 4; Pls 1, 2). No dating evidence was recovered from either feature.

Wall footing (20) was aligned north/south, and measured 4m long, 0.33m deep and up to 1.65m

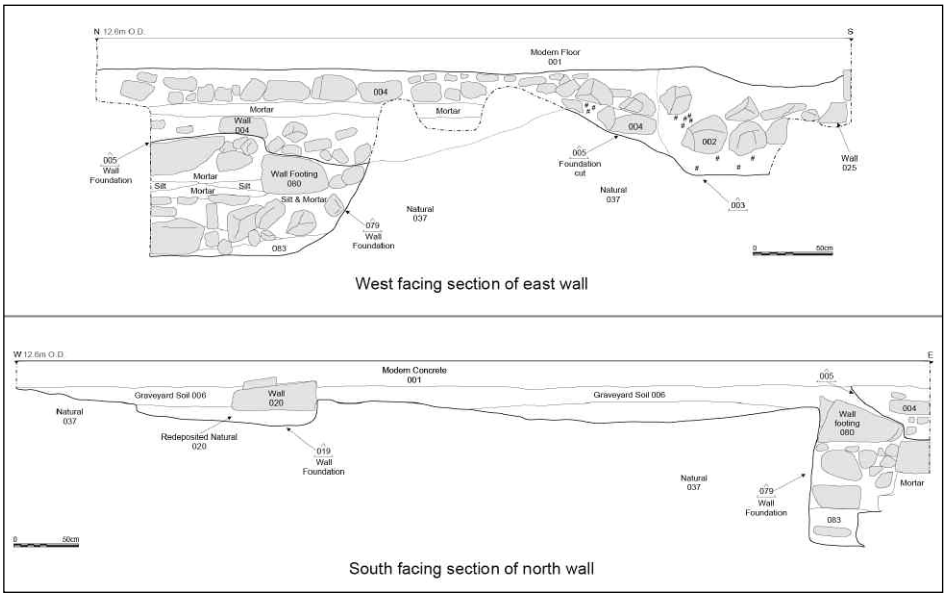


Fig 4 The north and east sections of the excavation area.

wide. On the west side and of the same build was an additional east/west aligned wall, 1.1m long and 0.9m wide, possibly the foundations of a buttress. Wall foundation cut (19) was of identical dimensions with shallow irregular sides and an uneven, stepped base. The wall footing was of poorly sorted, sub-angular and angular unworked stone blocks with occasional river-rolled cobbles. The stones were mostly granite with some limestone. Occasional granite stones had roughly tooled faces suggesting they were re-used. The stones were set in a soil matrix of redeposited natural orange-brown clayey sand and grey coarse sand. The footing was trench-built with the larger stones apparently randomly placed and the smaller stones packed in around them.

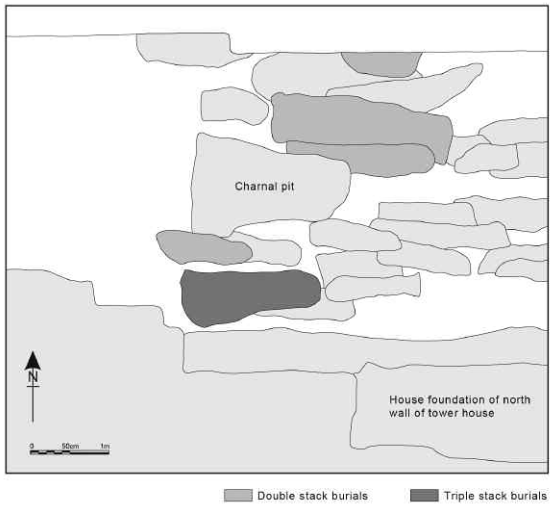
Wall footing (80) was only partially seen in the area of excavation. The wall footing was at least 0.58m wide, 1.78m long and 1.22m deep. The upper portion of the footing had been truncated by post-medieval wall footing (4). The wall footing foundation cut (79) was of identical dimensions, with an almost right-angled corner at the south and sides which varied from slightly undercut to

Pl 1 Medieval walls (20) facing south-east. The skeletons have been excavated and the grave cuts are visible.

Pl 2 Foundation cut (79) for medieval wall (80) facing north.

concave. The wall footing was trench-built with a basal levelling layer of loose, dark brown silty coarse sand (83) with occasional cobbles, up to 0.28m thick and seen throughout the foundation cut. Above this layer, wall footing (80) consisted of unworked stone blocks in a matrix of mixed mortar and brown silty sand. The uncoursed sub-angular blocks were poorly sorted and up to 0.5 by 0.4 by 0.3m in size. The footing appeared to represent the south-west corner of a building with wall faces aligned north/south and east/west.

Fig 5 Plan of the phase 3 late medieval cemetery and the phase 4 north wall foundation of the fortified house



Phase 3: Late medieval cemetery

A total of 35 articulated inhumations and an amount of disarticulated bone including nine skulls were excavated in a 20m^2 area (Figs 5, 6; Pl 3). Two articulated juveniles were identified amongst the disarticulated bone during post-excavation analysis. The inhumations were heavily intercut and the majority of the skeletons had suffered from at least partial truncation. All the inhumations were aligned east/west and where found the heads were to the west. The medieval wall footings were cut by some of the earliest burials. The burials are described in Table 1 with the earliest burials first. The grave measurements are as found and all the graves were aligned east/west. The skeletons were all supine and extended, with arms either by the side or across the body. The grave fills were all grey brown sand silt.

Charnel pit

A large charnel pit (14) (Fig 7; Pl 4) was partially dug through four inhumations (SK12, 18, 28, 29). Only the base of the pit remained, the rest being truncated by the laying of the bakery floor (1). The pit was irregular in plan and measured 2.2m long, 1.5m wide and 0.08m deep with shallow irregular sides. Where the pit encountered wall (20) the diggers had left the stones intact, opting instead for the softer grave soil. The disarticulated human bone in the pit fill (13) had been simply dumped, with no attempt to place or organize the bones. Seven disarticulated skulls (SK4, 10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 16) were recovered from the pit fill. Disarticulated skull (SK4) was of a young adult male with ten separate

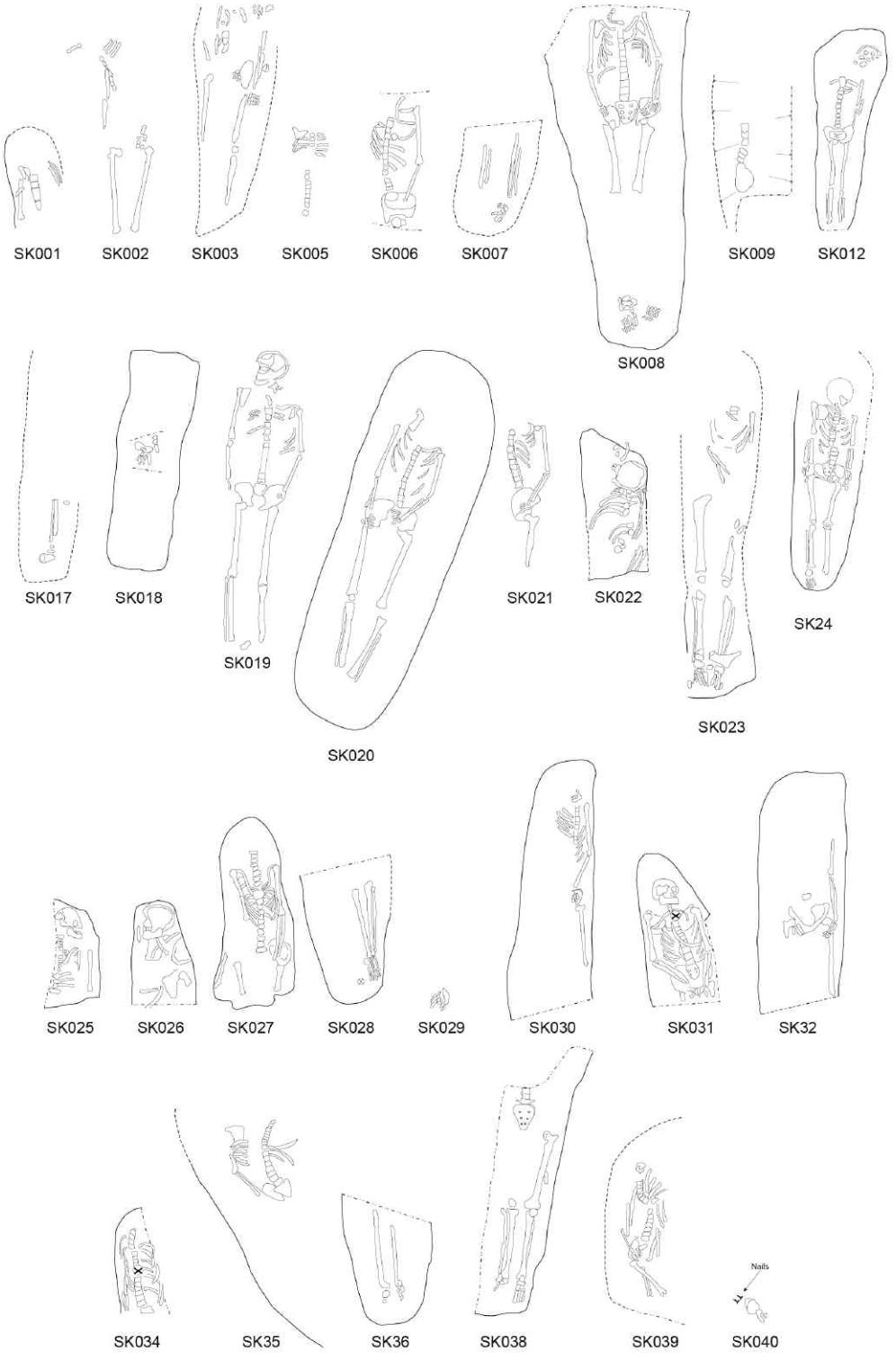


Fig 6 Selected individual skeleton plans.

Grave Cut No.	Length	Width	Depth	SK No.	Skeleton	Fill No.	Comment
24	1.3m	0.4m	0.22m	SK24 SK12	Juvenile Juvenile	23	Double stack burial
70	0.9m	0.44m	0.3m	SK37	Adult probable male	71	Legs only
40	0.6m	0.4m	0.22m	SK25	Young adult female	41	
68	0.72m	0.47m	0.3m	SK36	Adult probable female	67	Lower legs only. Coffin nail find.
44	1.2m	0.44m	0.18m	SK27	Young adult female	45	
78	1.5m	0.38m	0.22m	SK38	Young adult male	75	Remains of wooden coffin
22	0.15m	0.15m	0.1m	SK09	Young adult male	21	Only the abdomen survived
58	1.2m	0.4m	0.1m	SK33	Adult	59	Coffin nail finds
51	1.42m	0.46m	0.08m	SK30 SK29	Unknown Unknown	50	Double stack burial
27	0.3m	0.2m	0.1m	SK17	Adult	26	Right lower leg only
48	0.76m	0.46m	0.18m	SK28	Adult	47	Lower legs only
62	0.58m	0.24m	0.2m	SK28	Adult female	61	Coffin nail find
31	1.8m	0.55m	0.3m	SK21 SK19	Late middle adult female Late middle adult female	30	Double stack burial; remains of wooden coffin and coffin nails
38	0.8m	0.3m	0.06m	SK22	Adult male	39	Four weapon wounds on skull
36	1.64m	0.4m	0.06m	SK23	Adult	35	
55	0.84m	0.36m	0.24m	SK31	Older adult male	54	
43	0.56m	0.36m	0.15m	SK26	Older adult female	42	
18	0.3m	0.2m	0.1m	SK07	Adult	17	
33	2.14m	0.67m	0.2m	SK20	Early middle adult male	32	
56	1.3m	0.58m	0.25m	SK32	Young adult male	57	
66	1.4m	0.7m	0.1m	SK35	Older adult male	65	Four coffin nail finds
77	1m	0.3m	0.08m	SK39 SK40	Young adult male Middle adult male	76	
12	1.2m	0.4m	0.1m	SK03	Adult male	11	
10	0.3m	0.25m	0.1m	SK02	Middle adult male	09	
29	1.18m	0.34m	0.12m	SK18	Adult female	28	Abdomen only
08	0.4m	0.4m	0.1m	SK01	Adult	07	Torso only
16	1.88m	0.74m	0.28m	SK05 SK06 SK08	Young adult Early middle adult male Late middle adult female	15 15	Triple stack burial

Table 1 Graves and skeletons.

Pl 3 Excavation of the skeletons. Note the location of the foundations of the north wall of the fortified house behind the excavator.

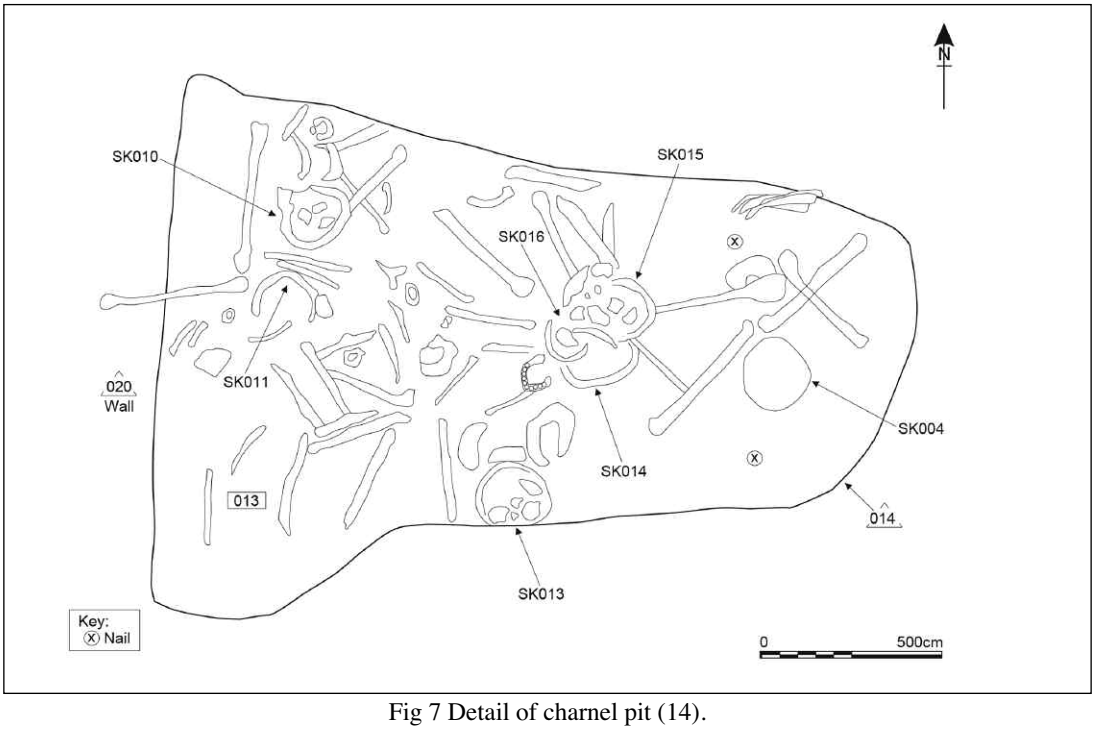


Fig 7 Detail of charnel pit (14).

Pl 4 Charnel pit (14) facing south.

weapon wounds to the back of the head. (SK10) was adult and probably female. Skull (SK14) had a weapon wound to the rear. The other skulls were all adult males.

Phase 4: 16th-century fortified house

The foundations of the north wall of the fortified house (25) formed the southern edge of the area of excavation (Fig 5; Pl 6). Post-medieval underpinning had unfortunately destroyed the stratigraphic relationship between the house foundations and the cemetery.

Pl 6 Foundations (25) of the north wall of the fortified house. The 19th-century wall underpinning is visible at the front.

SKELETAL REPORT

*Laureen Buckley**

Population characteristics

Most of the burials were in a moderate to good state of preservation but they were highly fragmented and incomplete. The 35 burials consisted of 31 adults and four juveniles. The ratio of males to females was 1.5:1. Due to the incompleteness of the skeletons, it was not possible to age nearly 40% of the adults. As the sample size was already small it is not possible to draw too many conclusions from the statistics. All that can be said is that the largest proportion of adults that could be aged was in the young adult category and that nearly 80% of adults were dead before they reached old age. The average living stature of the males was 172cm and of the females 161cm. This makes them taller than individuals found on most other Irish sites of various periods.

Adult age at death

It was possible to assign some of the adult burials to age groups. Four males and two females were younger adults, aged 17–25 years, four males and four females were middle adults, aged 26–44 years and of these two males and one female were early middle adults, 26–34 years, and three females were late middle adults, 35–44 years. There were three males and one female in the older age group, 45+ and four males and three females could only be classified as adult. Of the six burials that could not be sexed, only one could be aged and this was a young adult. This information is summarized in Tables 2 and 3.

A considerable proportion of the population (39%) was not aged. This lessens the reliability of the statistics; however, the largest group was the young adults with 7 individuals or 37% of those aged, being in this group. The next highest group was the older adults with 4 individuals (21% of aged adults) in this category. Over half of the population had died before reaching the age of 34 years. The main difference between males and females was that there were no males in the late middle adult group but 3 individuals (43% of aged females) died in this group. As already stated the small sample size, especially when the figures are broken into groups, make the statistics less reliable and it is impossible to know if these proportions would have been maintained if a larger sample had been excavated.

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Juvenile age at death

A minimum of four juveniles were recovered from the site. One juvenile was represented by stray bones in the disarticulated material and could not be aged. Burial (SK12) was truncated in the upper half so the teeth were not available for aging. However the length of the femur, when compared to other juveniles, indicates an age of 6–8 years (Buckley 1991). Burial (SK24) was almost complete and was aged by examination of the dentition to 10–12 years. There was also one infant bone noted, probably from an infant aged 6 months-1 year. Infant bones generally survive very well in burial conditions but only if they are undisturbed. If the ground is disturbed as has occurred frequently on this site, then the bones decay rapidly and tend to get fragmented. This makes it impossible to determine how many infants may have been originally present.

Skeletal pathology: weapon wounds

The most significant pathology identified was weapon trauma. There were at least three and possibly four individuals with evidence of weapon wounds. Three individuals had received sharp injuries to the skull, probably with a sword.

Burial (SK4), a young adult male, with only the back of the skull remaining, had a total of ten wounds to the skull (Fig 8). All except one of the wounds were made with a sharp linear instrument, probably a sword. However, there was one puncture wound with a V-shaped profile on the left mastoid area of the temporal bone, which would be just

	Young Adult	Early Middle Adult	Late Middle Adult	Middle Adult	Older Adult	Unaged	Total
Male	4	2	0	2	3	4	15
Female	2	1	3	0	1	3	10
Unsexed	1	0	0	0	0	5	6
Total	7	3	3	2	4	12	31

Table 2 Adult age at death.

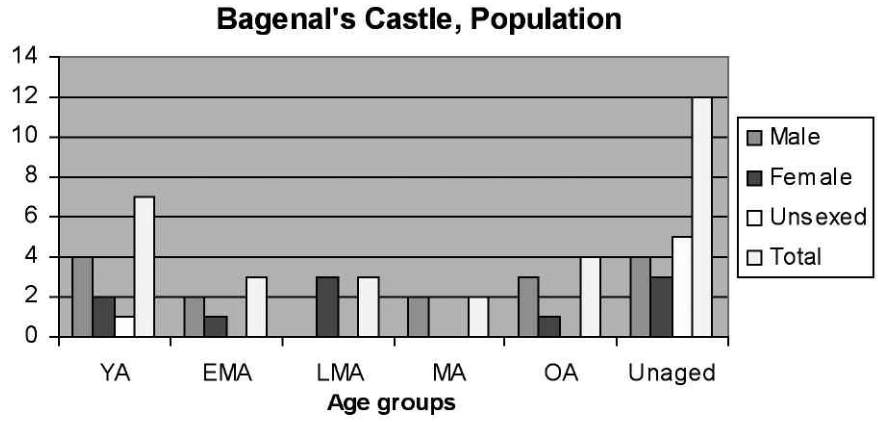


Table 3 Adult age at death.

behind the ear. This is consistent with a weapon being rammed straight into the skull, possibly while the individual was on the ground but it is not possible to say what sort of weapon was used

Just below this wound was a sharp incised wound that had entered at a slight downward angle. Three of the wounds were on the right side of the occipital bone, crossing the lamboid suture. They were oblique wounds at various angles suggesting slashing movements of the sword, with the attacker probably being right handed and attacking from the rear.

The large wound to the right parietal bone is also consistent with an attack by a right-handed opponent to the back of the skull. There was a large wound to the left parietal bone, which had been

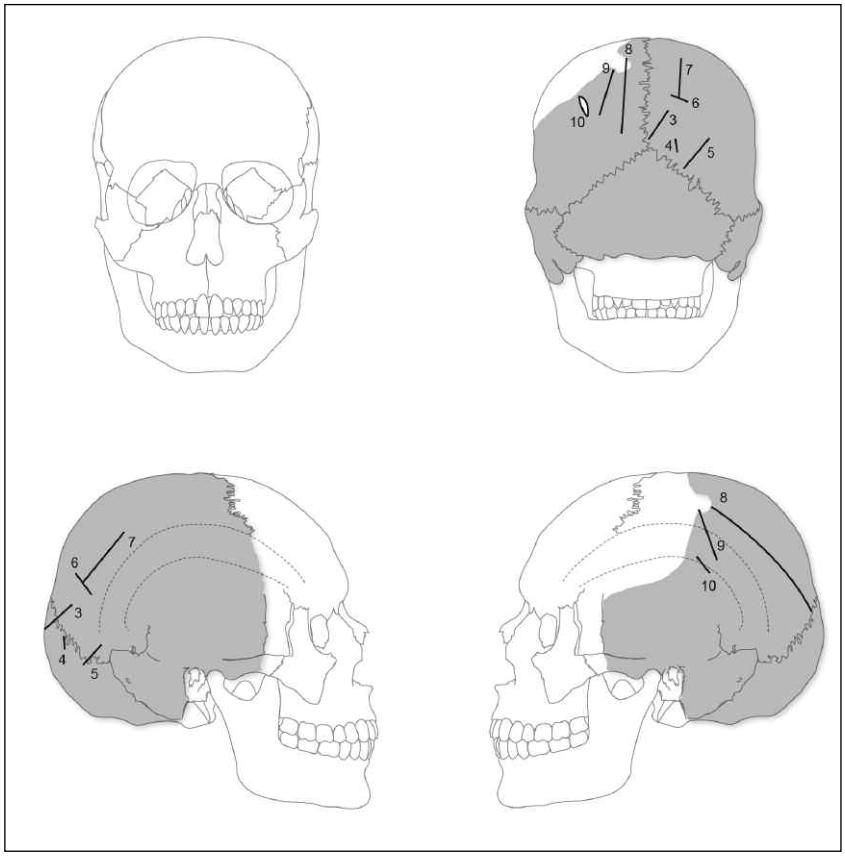


Fig 8 Positions of wounds on (SK4)

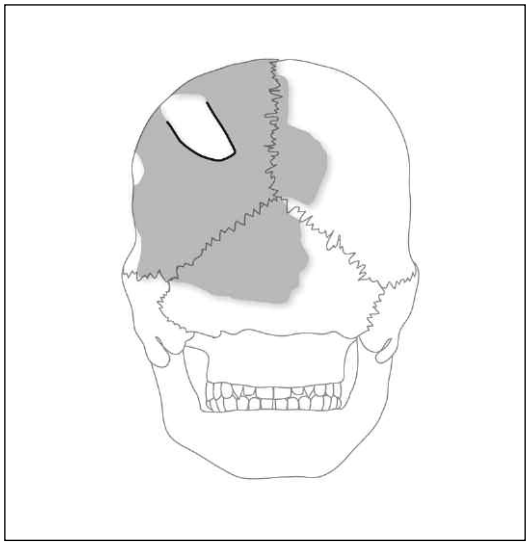
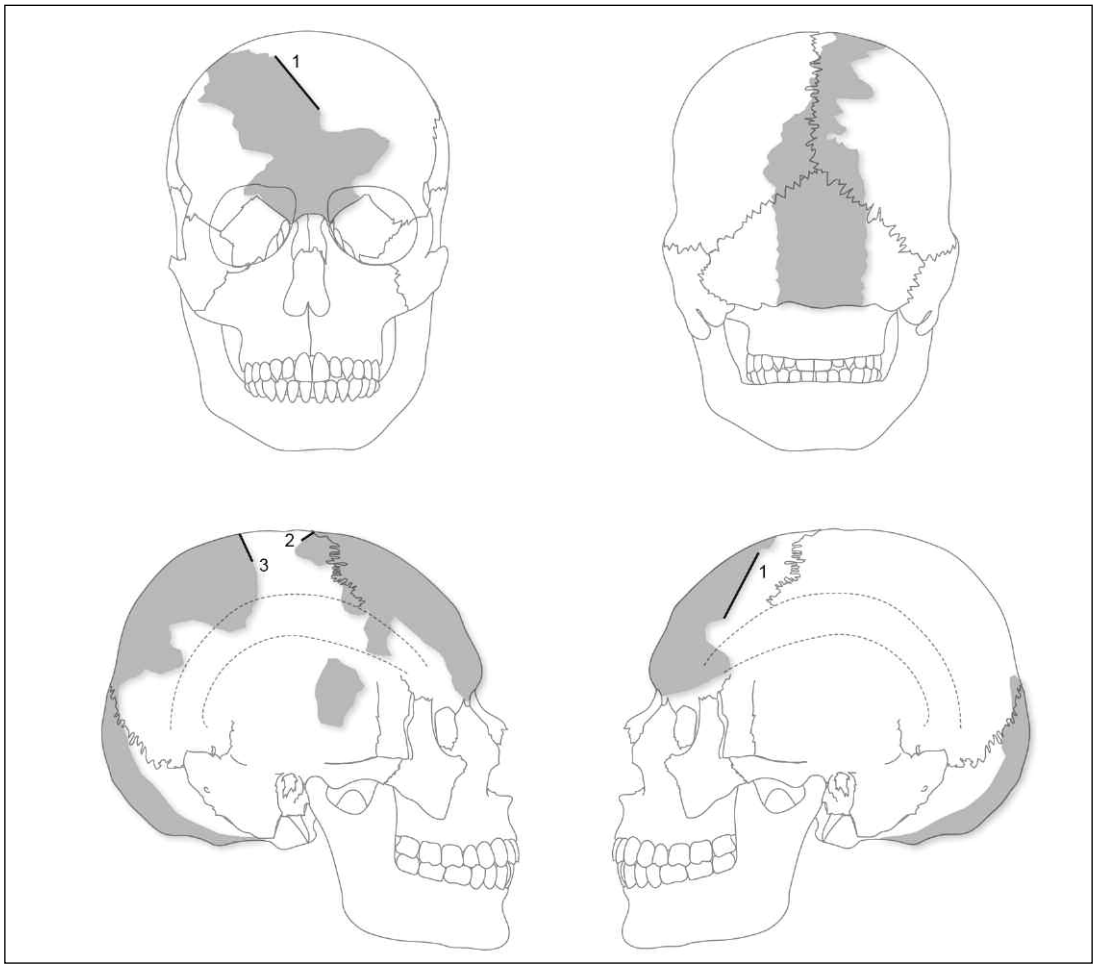


Fig 9 Position of wound on (SK14).

delivered from above and had almost split the skull in two. This wound could have been inflicted when the victim was falling on his knees after the blows to the back of the skull. Another smaller wound to the left parietal bone could have occurred when the individual was in a kneeling position and falling backwards. The last blow appears to have been a small glancing sideways blow to the left parietal bone. Again this is consistent with the slashing movements of the sword, probably in a battle situation where several blows can be inflicted in a matter of minutes. The roughness of the posterior half of the smooth edge of this cut suggests that the sword had been damaged slightly after all its use. Some of the sword wounds had entered sideways to the skull, penetrating between the outer cortex and the diploe. This is similar to the type of wounds noted on the skulls of four battle victims found at Carlingford, Co Louth, and thought to date to the

Fig 10 Positions of wounds on (SK22).



Pl 5 A disarticulated right tibia, recovered from the general grave soil (6), with evidence of sharp weapon wounds.

17th century (Buckley & Conway 2004).

Burial (SK14) consisted of the left and right parietal bone and most of the squamous occipital bone. There was a sharp weapon wound, 7cm long to the left parietal bone (Fig 9). The weapon, probably a sword, had entered the bone cleanly at the medial edge but had been roughly removed at the posterior edge. The blow seems to have removed a chunk of bone from the skull, as there is a gap between the medial and lateral edges of the wound that is 3cm at its widest point. Again this is paralleled at Carlingford where two of the victims had chunks of bone removed from their skulls.

Burial (SK22) was also an adult male, although the skeleton was so incomplete an exact age could not be given. Very little remained from the skull but four sharp weapon wounds were noted (Fig 10). There was a 5cm linear cut through the middle of the frontal bone, running obliquely from the right side to the left side. The sword had entered the bone smoothly at a slight angle and had penetrated the outer cortex and most of the diploe but the internal surface was roughly broken.

There was another small cut on the anterior part of the right parietal bone but due to the incompleteness of the skull the full extent of this cut could not be seen. A third cut was situated in the middle of the right parietal bone and went across the skull parallel to the coronal suture. It was 3.5cm in length but the full extent could not be seen due to the incompleteness of the skull. A fourth sharp cut was found on a fragment of parietal bone but it was not possible to connect this fragment to the rest of the skull and this is not illustrated. The end point of the sword was visible in this cut.

In addition to the wounds to the skull, there was a right tibia from the general grave soil (6) with evidence of sharp weapon wounds. There was a cut to the front of the leg, just below the tibial tuberosity, close to the knee area. A large slice of bone has been removed and the blow seems to have been an upward thrust from below as the inferior part of the wound is smooth but the superior part is rough where the sword was roughly removed. There was also a small incised wound through this larger wound and at right angles to it. About 7cm below the large wound, in the middle of the tibia shaft there was another smaller, sharp wound on the anterior border that had smoothly removed the outer cortex of the bone (Pl 5). As the bone was smoothly removed it was not possible to identify the direction of the cut.

Given that the major wound to this lower leg bone came from below, it is probable that the victim was attacked while at a height above his attacker, possibly while he was on horseback.

Other possible trauma

Burial (SK15) consisted of a disarticulated skull only and was in a very poor state of preservation. However, there was an oval lesion to the left side of the frontal bone with destruction of the outer cortex and some destruction of the diploe. This probably represents an area of differential post-mortem erosion acting on a lesion that was already present. This may be an area of a minor blunt force trauma to the skull but equally could be an area of porotic hyperostosis or other lesion.

Burial (SK20), an early middle adult male, had a healed oblique fracture of the middle third of the left radius. This type of fracture is either caused by

a fall on the hand or a direct blow to the arm and in fact is a typical defence wound (Crawford Adams 1992, 145). Another male, burial (SK3), had a callus in the proximal third of the shaft of the left femur, on the anterior surface. The muscles in the thigh are the most powerful in the body so any complete break in the bone causes considerable overlap of bone due to the muscle pull. As this has not happened here and the callus is confined to a linear area of the anterior surface, it is possible that the break in the bone is actually a result of a weapon wound. The wound was of long standing as the callus is now smooth, so it is not possible to determine the original cause of the break.

These injuries were non-accidental. One male had a fracture to the lower arm that may have resulted from a direct blow when the arm was raised in defence in a battle or fight situation. Three individuals had direct evidence for battle injury with all having sharp sword injuries to the skull. One in particular, a young male, had ten separate wounds to the back of the skull most of which were inflicted by a right-handed attacker using slashing movements of the sword and the 'fight' could all have been over in minutes, although not without causing some damage to the sword. Another male had a chunk of bone removed from the skull and the injuries to these two skulls were similar to those noted in four young males found in Carlingford that had also died as a result of sword injuries and dated to the 17th century. The third individual was also male and, although the skull was very incomplete in this case, at least three sharp weapon wounds were noted. A tibia with three sword wounds was found in the disarticulated remains and the direction of the cuts suggests that the victim may have been on horseback when he was attacked.

DISCUSSION

Phase 1: Natural geology

The natural was found to be relatively level across the excavated area. The building of the 19th-century warehouse would have undoubtedly terraced the natural east to west downhill slope. This would have removed an unknown thickness of the upper archaeological deposits.

Phase 2: Medieval abbey precinct buildings

The footings were of noticeably similar builds, both being uncoursed and trench-built, and used similar unworked stone. The most striking difference was the depth of the foundations, wall footing (20) 0.33m deep and located at 12.30m OD and wall footing (80) 1.22m deep and located at 11.40m OD. This difference in depth is not easily explained as both were found on the same underlying ground and both were clearly large load-bearing walls.

Despite the depth difference, it seems likely that the walls were contemporary and part of the same building. If this is the case, then wall (20) appears to have been external with a buttress located on the outer west face and wall (80) was a large internal wall forming a corner.

Both walls had the upper portions truncated by the later digging of graves. This activity might explain the absence of the associated floor levels. However, there were no finds of residual flooring material, stone or otherwise, from the grave fills. With this in mind, what seems more likely is that the building(s) were formally demolished and any floor material was robbed out well before the cemetery was begun.

These were clearly the footings of a large building(s) of at least two stories. However due to the limited nature of the investigations little else can be said with certainty about the form or function. Nothing was found during the archaeological monitoring by Dermot Moore approximately 10m north of the excavation, suggesting that either the buildings did not continue so far or all traces had been removed. Nothing of the abbey precinct remains today and little has been positively identified by archaeological investigations. Archaeobotanical material recovered from an environmental sample of levelling layer (83) below wall (80) included barley seeds and hazelnuts, which suggests the surrounding habitat was of pasture or arable.

Phase 3: Late medieval cemetery

Thirty-one inhumations were excavated from approximately five cubic metres of cemetery soil, which equates to roughly to six inhumations per cubic metre. This is a relatively high density of graves and is typical of urban cemeteries. The frequency of graves intercutting is also a testimony to the premium on cemetery space and possibly suggests that the individual graves were not marked.

Date of the cemetery

The full extent of the cemetery is not known. The cemetery appeared to continue north and east beyond the area of excavation. To the west, the graves stopped abruptly in an approximate line. This may have been the location of the cemetery boundary marked by some unidentified means such as a hedge or fence. A 19th-century account suggests the cemetery may once have been extensive:

> Large quantities of human bones, some of them of very uncommon size, have been dug up at

> different times, both in front and in rear of this edifice [Bagenal's Castle], a circumstance which proves the ground contiguous to the abbey had been appropriated to the burying of the dead. About 80 or 90 years ago, a merchant of the town on digging the foundations within the precincts of the ancient abbey found a human skeleton 7 feet in length. Some remains of shoes, which bore the impressions of buckles, and some remnants probably of the shroud were discovered (Day & McWilliams 1990, 63).

The building entrance was still located in the west in the 19th century, so 'in front and in rear' corresponds to the west and the east of the building. No burials have been found in these areas during modern times, as unfortunately both areas were shown, during this and previous investigations, to have been heavily truncated by the conversion of the site into a bakery. However, this 19th-century reference does suggest that the fortified house was located in the middle of the cemetery.

The dating of the burials is problematic but clearly critical to their interpretation. No datable finds were recovered from the entire excavation and the only surviving stratigraphic relationship the cemetery deposits had was with the Phase 2 wall foundations, which the burials were dug through and overlay. The key stratigraphic relationship between the cemetery deposits and the north wall of the fortified house had been removed by 19th-century underpinning of the upstanding wall foundations.

A collagen extract from (SK1) was radiocarbon dated to AD1460-1660 (95% 2 Sigma calibrated result; see Appendix), a period that covers both the twilight years of the abbey and the years after Nicholas Bagenal had taken control of the lands in 1552. Although it appears that the cemetery could relate equally to either period, it is considered on balance that the burials date to the earlier monastic land-use.

Of the 33 burials, at least six were interred in simple unadorned coffins constructed of wooden planks fastened with iron nails. The coffins survived mostly as patches of desiccated wood and corroded nails and it was not possible to determine the exact coffin shape. In England, the issue of how frequently wooden coffins were used in late medieval cemeteries has been contentious. Litten believes, mainly on the basis of historical sources, that their use did not become common for the majority of the population until the 17th century (Litten 2002, 86). However, a recent survey of over 8,000 archaeologically excavated burials has established that a significant number of individuals were buried in wooden coffins throughout the medieval period (Gilchrist & Sloane 2005, 111). Therefore, despite some of the Newry burials being interred in coffins, it is still not unreasonable to suggest a 15th/16th-century date.

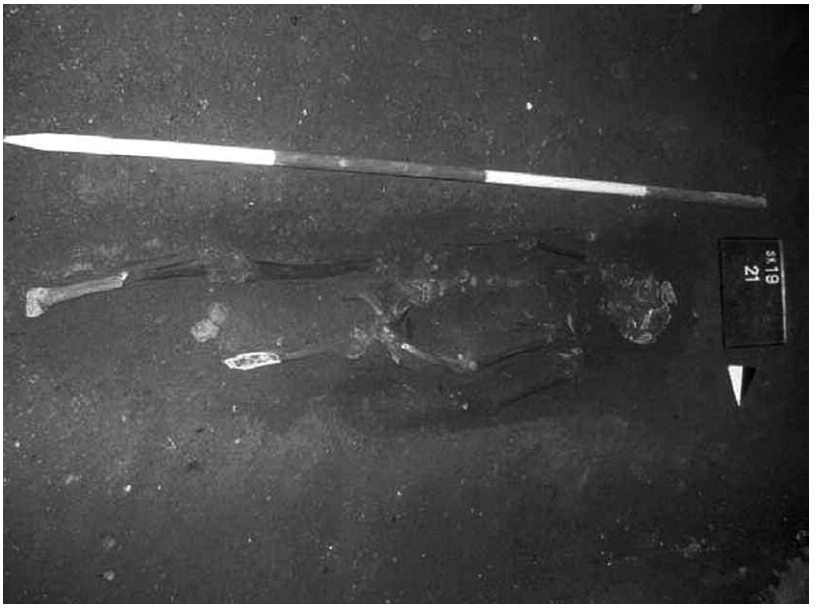
A late medieval monastic cemetery?

The main consideration against these burials being contemporary with the fortified house from the mid-16th century is that it is largely inconceivable that an active cemetery would be sited immediately adjacent to the most important military building in Newry. Not only was this building secular, but according to the only contemporary cartographic record, the Lythe map, there was no ecclesiastical building in the vicinity. The map also does not show any cemetery around the house, only an open area.

As mentioned above, it appears that the fortified house was located in the middle of the cemetery. It seems highly improbable that a military commander like Nicholas Bagenal would have allowed a cemetery to restrict his access and provide would-be attackers with cover. Further more, as Sir Nicholas had been marshall of the army and a member of the Dublin Privy Council, the Bagenals were clearly an ambitious family with social aspirations and the house was a very public expression of their status. Surrounding their Newry home with the graves and mourners of the common Irish populace would hardly have appealed even to the most humble of English nobles.

The cemetery contained the remains of both women and juveniles, whose burials are not usually expected within monastic sites. However, the Cistercians allowed lay burial within their precincts from 1215, and it has been suggested that the presence of such burials may be the result of a particular relationship with the monastic community – through patronage, family ties, or the association of vowesses (Gilchrist & Sloane 2005, 64–5). Monasteries usually had the principal cemetery directly next to the church. There was usually a spatial division between the burials of the lay and the clergy; the lay cemetery was usually located on the side of the church away from the conventual buildings and often close to the precinct gate. However, some monasteries, such as Abingdon Abbey, Oxfordshire, and St Augustine's, Canterbury, had more complex arrangements with separate cemeteries associated with a chapel, or a hospital, often located some distance from the church (ibid, 32–41).

The Lythe map shows the monastery church still standing some 200m to the south of the site. Clearly as this cemetery could not have been associated with the church, it appears that it was a separate



Pl 7 Double stack burial of (SK19, 21).

outlying cemetery associated with some other precinct building. It is perhaps significant that Bagenal, according to later sources, is believed to have built his fortified house in the ruins of the abbey, specifically the 'abbot's house'. The preliminary results of the standing building survey appear to have identified the first empirical evidence for Bagenal reusing the abbey ruins as the basis for his house. The lower portion of the north wall to the house was a different and earlier build to the rest of the building (James Patience, pers comm). This earlier building may well have been the alleged 'abbot's house', although it may have originally started out with a different function, possibly as a building with an associated cemetery, such as a chapel or hospital.

Violent deaths

We can be quite confident that a number, or even a majority, of the 33 individuals exhumed, suffered untimely and violent deaths. This is demonstrated by two aspects of the archaeological evidence: the pathology of the physical skeletal remains and the unusual practice of coterminous or group burials.

The osteoarchaeological analysis identified at least three individuals with evidence of weapon wounds, all of whom had received sharp injuries to the skull, probably from a sword. One individual in particular, a young male, had suffered a frenzied attack of ten separate wounds to the back of the skull, probably while prone or kneeling. A single disarticulated tibia with three sword wounds represented a possible fourth individual and suggested that the victim may have been on horseback at the time of the attack.

The occurrence of coterminous or group burials, especially double burials of children, are fairly common in monastic cemeteries. At the cemetery of St Mary Spital, London, a burial 'stack' of eleven individuals dating between the 14th and 16th centuries was excavated (Gilchrist & Sloane 2005, 158). These have been interpreted as relating to some catastrophic event, such as plague.

A third of the burials excavated at Newry were multiple individuals placed in a single grave cut. Four double burials and a triple burial all had the individuals stacked above one another rather than laid out side by side. There was no recutting of the graves and skeletons directly overlay one another, clearly indicating that the burials were one event. The double stack burials were of two juveniles (SK12, 24); two skeletons (SK30, 29) which could not be sexed or aged; two middle adult females (SK19, SK21) (Pl 7), and the triple stack burial of a young adult, an early middle adult male and a middle adult female (SK8, 6, 5).

Presumably the individuals interred together died at roughly the same time and there was some connection or relationship between them, probably belonging to the same family unit. Although none of the potential family group individuals exhibited weapon wounds, it is possible they could have also suffered violent deaths during the same conflict, dying of wounds that were restricted to the soft tissues and left no trace on the skeletons.

APPENDIX
RADIOCARBON DETERMINATION

Sample Data Measured 13C/12C Conventional
Radiocarbon Age Ratio Radiocarbon Age (*)
Beta - 211368 250 +/- 40 BP -20.9 o/oo 320 +/- 40 BP
Sample: Bagenals001
Analysis: AMS-Standard delivery
Material/pretreatment: (bone collagen): collagen extraction: with alkali
2 Sigma calibration: Cal AD 1460 to 1660 (Cal BP 490 to 290)

Calibration of radiocarbon age to calendar years
(Variables: C13/C12=-20.9:lab. mult=1)
Laboratory number: Beta-211368
Conventional radiocarbon age: 320±40 BP2 Sigma calibrated result: (95% probability)
Cal AD 1460 to 1660 (Cal BP 490 to 290)

Intercept data Intercepts of radiocarbon age with calibration curve:
Cal AD 1530 (Cal BP 420) and
Cal AD 1560 (Cal BP 390) and
Cal AD 1630 (Cal BP 320) 1

Sigma calibrated result: (68% probability)
Cal AD 1500 to 1640 (Cal BP 450 to 310)

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